

Media and Legacies of War

Responses to Global Film Violence in Conflict Zones

by Victor M. F. Igreja

This article examines the phenomenon of informal video houses showing action films with scenes of violence to young people in Gorongosa, a district in the center of Mozambique. Recent socioeconomic interventions and development in the region have occurred in tandem with the growing popularity of violent action films among young people, which has been cause for concern among their parents and guardians. The ambivalent responses of Gorongosa residents toward this trend indicate the need to analyze the implications of film violence in the context of evolving local rituals of revelation and multiple legacies of the civil war (1976–1992) as well as emerging postwar challenges. The results significantly contrast with psychological studies of media violence that link consumption of film violence to serious negative effects on young viewers. In Gorongosa, film violence is implicated in expanding relations of domination and submission and violence and its containment, which enhance ongoing processes of self-assertion among young people in unpredictable ways, without, however, inciting violence in the communities. This study has significant implications for understanding the reception of mass media violence among young people in conflict zones.

The end of civil wars is often, for justifiable reasons, enthusiastically celebrated, although it does not necessarily eliminate the specter of violence. In many postwar societies, war survivors often express the wish, along the lines of Walter Benjamin's (1986), that in everyday life, violence should no longer be exercised or tolerated naively. Experiences of postwar recovery in numerous countries, however, show "a violence continuum" (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004; Whitehead 2007; Wilson 2000) that encompasses diverse forms, including intimate partner violence, sexual assault and rape, armed robbery and kidnapping, and structural violence. Young people often find themselves affected by these disturbing phenomena, but families, communities, and state institutions increasingly expect them to find their own solutions. Anthropologists have extensively analyzed these predicaments and the ways in which young people struggle to find resolution (Abbink 2005; Boyden and de Berry 2005; Durham 2000; Honwana and de Boeck 2005). The focus of this article is young people's consumption of film violence—a polarizing phenomenon around the world—in Gorongosa, central Mozambique. Action films with scenes of violence are popular among young people while held suspect and often criticized by their adult guardians and other concerned people within state institutions and society.

At a recent press conference, journalists quoted the South African national head of the Harmful Religious Practice Unit, Colonel Attie Lambrecht, who expressed the urgent need to address the influence of media technologies in promoting "occult economies" (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999). Lambrecht warned that Hollywood actions films and greater access to smartphones and computers were implicated in the rise of what is locally termed "satanic crimes," or "occult-related crimes," involving "black youth" in South Africa.¹ In spite of the long history of psychological and experimental research on the impact of media violence on young people, the topic remains controversial, captivating ever more diverse research and analysis (Bandura, Ross, and Ross 1963; Bushman and Huesmann 2001; Cantor 1998; Edgar 1977; Zillmann 1971). My approach is anthropological, which is often absent in studies of media violence among youths.

The few anthropologists who have dealt with the popularity of media violence among young people in non-Western settings have adopted analyses inspired by modernity approaches, whereby media violence fosters new cultures of masculinity and violence (Appadurai 1996; High 2010; Richards 1996). These analyses have been extolled for moving beyond familiar dichotomies of real/imaginary and mimicking/learning—a move instrumental to eschewing notions that infantilize young people's experiences of media violence or, for that matter, people's experiences with diverse mass media—and thereby adopting an emancipatory approach (cf. Abu-Lughod 2005; Dickey 1993; Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod, and Larkin 2002; Larkin 2008; Mankekar 1993; Masquelier 2009). Yet there is a certain sense of deter-

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1. *The Star* newspaper, February 27, 2014, p. 2.

minism in analyses of the popularity of media violence among young people that does not readily capture complex experiences in diverse sociocultural contexts.

Complex approaches to social transformation processes in affiliated disciplinary circles rightly acknowledge that societal transformations are rarely predicated on linear trajectories that evoke the sort of stark antitheses (tradition/modernity, past/present) that appear to imbue the idea of new cultures of masculinity. Major events in society become engulfed in continuities and uncertainties (Asad 2003:195; Sahlins 1985:153) so that anthropological analyses should account for how new events become “embroiled in local histories, in local appropriations and transpositions” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997:6). Often, the implications of these mediations and ambiguities are analyzed with a focus on adults, while little is known, for instance, of how young people participate in the reception of media violence as unfolding in contemporary “intersections of local and translocal fields of power” (Mankekar 1999:47).

Following the protracted civil war (1976–1992) and postwar developments in Mozambique, the reception of film violence by young people—and, more broadly, by their communities—offers possibilities for overcoming current gaps in the anthropology of media violence. I demonstrate that a comprehensive analysis of the reception of film violence and its implications in processes of self-assertion among young people cannot ignore ongoing processes of social change. For instance, the civil war caused overwhelming destruction and suffering beyond the theaters of war, but it also triggered diverse transformations, particularly in divination and healing rituals, as well as changes in social relations, whereby young people have attempted to dissipate adults’ bids to strictly control them on matters of sexuality and arranged marriage. Thus, rather than a deterministic relation, the reception of film violence in tandem with war and postwar experiences shows a less obvious and more anxious negotiated process of self-assertion among young people in Mozambique.

Although the viewers of televised media violence form a diverse audience, I emphasize the experiences and perceptions of young people, notwithstanding the opposition of their adult guardians and the claims by owners and managers of *salões* (video houses) that film violence is for entertainment. I analyze young people’s diverse experiences of film violence as well as the heightened tensions between them and their adult guardians. Both the meaning imposed on film violence and the resulting social tensions become intelligible by including in the analysis diverse local mediation practices, particularly the rituals of revelation enacted by *gamba* (plural, *magamba*; the spirits of soldiers who died young in the Mozambican civil war; Igreja, Dias-Lambranca, and Richters 2008; Marlin 2001). These spirits incorporate imaginaries of violence and are implicated in processes of self-assertion among young people in ways that intersect with film violence. Furthermore, the adult guardians’ attempts to forget their memories of war suffering and regain an authoritative control over the social relations of their offspring also play out in shaping the reception of film violence.

By taking seriously the voices of young people and their reasons for watching media violence, the local notion in Portuguese of *talentos* (skills) emerges in ways that capture a less obvious process of self-assertion among young people. The young people’s “semantic creativity” (Parkin 1982:xl–vi), manifested through the adoption of multifaceted vocabularies (*talentos*), tells of their struggle to assert power and establish hierarchical relations in everyday life. Through this lens, the local notion of *talentos* appears as production and effect (or visible performance) of embodied revelations evolving from mediated violence and cultural ideas regarding access to meaningful knowledge. Overall, I propose a more complex analysis of culture as mobile object (Ortner 2006), wherein mass media objects circulating the world do not simply dislodge or extinguish existing practices of mediation and personal and collective transformation. In Gorongosa, the popularity of film violence renders visible ongoing practices of self-assertion among young people while stimulating the consciousness of existing—and sometimes seemingly forgotten—languages and mechanisms of mediation. This article draws attention to how media violence becomes implicated in evolving local processes of self-assertion in which young people contain and magnify relations of domination and submission among themselves without inciting violence.

Setting and Road Map

Gorongosa is a rural district in the center of Mozambique characterized by a political, legal, and religious pluralism in which community and state institutions and players interact. The region is also characterized by patrilineal kinship, polygyny, and monogamy within an agriculture-based economy. The people speak chi-Gorongosi, a mixture of regional vernacular languages (Sena, Ndaue, Nhungue, and Tewe), and a minority speak Portuguese. Social life in the district unfolds in an unpredictable environment marked by the existence of visible and invisible forces and objects that nevertheless constitute transient categories. Medicines and spirits—in the broader sense that spirits are also persons (Lambek 1993)—play a continuous role in negotiating and transforming material and intangible forces and chaos and order (Igreja 2012). In this way, certain forms of knowledge and objects are regarded as more instrumental than others, especially when it comes to tapping into and finding ways out of pressures exerted by powerful forces in the world (Igreja 2014).

One of the pressures continuously exerted on Gorongosa is war. The district was affected by Portuguese colonialism, particularly through forced labor, and later ravaged by the anticolonial war that pitted the Mozambican Liberation Front (Frelimo) against Portuguese colonial forces (1971–1974). In the wake of the country’s independence in June 1975, the Frelimo government experimented with a revolutionary Marxist-Leninist style of government (Hanlon 1984). The excesses of the revolution, including the persecution and summary execution of alleged internal enemies, coupled with the Cold War dynamics

shaping the Southern African region, gave birth to a postcolonial civil war between the Frelimo-led government and the rebel movement, the Mozambican National Resistance (Renamo). This war affected the region for almost two decades (1976–1992).²

During the civil war in Gorongosa, the notion that “war has no age” became commonplace and was used to justify the compulsory recruitment of children and young people to perform diverse roles in the war (Schafer 2007). The majority of these youth lived within war zones throughout the entire period of unrest (Igreja and Dias-Lambranca 2009). The violence caused immense destruction, major population movements, and bitter community divisions, but it also fostered the restructuring of social relations in unpredictable ways (Lubkemann 2008; West 2000). Serious family disputes and splits occurred; sometimes adults were unable to protect their own children. Many children and young people ended up despised and abandoned, sometimes dying of illness and starvation. Some parents compelled their young children (boys and girls) to hasten marriage as a potential protection against humiliation and loss in the wake of rape by soldiers, while other young girls were said to “go after the boots” (*ku toera mabota*; i.e., to follow the soldiers) to survive (Igreja 2010b). Ultimately, many of these young people had to find ways to survive on their own in the bush, and self-assertion in the form of risky decisions was instrumental to their survival, just as it was for Ishmael Beah (2007) in his autobiographical tales of war, persecution, and resilience in Sierra Leone. Following the peace agreement signed in October 1992, war survivors in Mozambique spoke only indirectly about their horrific war experiences. Through the interventions of *gamba* spirits, however, they were able to reenact war violence and call alleged perpetrators to publicly account for their abuses and crimes.

Until quite recently, Gorongosa was isolated from the surrounding urban centers, and television was a rare commodity. While official statistics describe economic progress in the past 20 years, and districts such as Gorongosa have integrated in the global economy, the majority of people are still confronted with poverty, HIV/AIDS, structural violence, the disruption of family, sexual assault and rape, armed robbery, and witchcraft assault, all of which create community insecurity and exert a serious toll on young people and adults (Igreja, Kleijn, and Richters 2006).³ In 2012, as a result of serious protracted political disagreements with the Frelimo government, the opposition Renamo rearmed and established itself in Gorongosa. From this location, Renamo initiated another war against the government; this war lasted a year (2013–2014), increasing social unrest and instability in the region (Igreja 2015a).

Government programs have not, in general, provided direct or effective responses to the harms and threats that young

people and adults must contend with. Consecutive postwar governments, nevertheless, rebuilt infrastructure such as roads, schools, health posts, and local markets. By 2006, the state was providing electricity to a number of the district’s inhabitants. The electricity supply was pivotal to integrating Gorongosa into global circuits of media technologies. This integration took diverse forms, one being the installation of *salões de filmes*, informal theaters housed in reed and mud huts where films are screened on televisions linked to DVD players.⁴

My research in Gorongosa began in 1997, and I have intermittently conducted research in the region over the past 15 years. Over time, I have analyzed the diverse experiences of war survivors and postwar generations, including how they have suffered socially and what resources they have tapped into to deal with the effects of war and emerging postwar challenges. The data I present here, particularly the interviews and observations, were gathered over several periods between 2009 and 2013, when I attended a number of *salões de filmes* and watched numerous films. My interlocutors, who frequented the *salões*, belonged to the category of youth in that they were single and did not have children; some of them also participated in *tchiwara* home-based teaching (see below). The adults called them *wa pales* (youth) in chi-Gorongosi and *miudos* or *putos* (kids) in Portuguese. The youth varied in age from 6 to 19 years old, and their group was composed of 10 girls and 75 boys.⁵ I also observed their everyday lives and informally spoke with some young viewers and their adult guardians in their houses, schools, and marketplaces. The informality of the *salões* facilitated the analysis of the films themselves and the observations of the audience’s reactions. My conversations were in Portuguese; occasionally, some interlocutors mixed Portuguese with the chi-Gorongosi language. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim; for the most part, interviewees are given pseudonyms, but their ages are disclosed. Some interviewees adopted the name of a particular film actor or invented new names for themselves; in these cases, they are identified by their adopted names.

Anthropological Studies of Media and Media Violence

The circulation of media technologies in remote communities around the world has not gone unnoticed by anthropologists. Numerous anthropological studies and analyses have covered a diverse range of mass media (Abu-Lughod 2005; Dickey 1993; Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod, and Larkin 2002; Larkin 2008; Mankekar 1993; Spitulnik 1993). Following Anderson’s celebrated (1983) study of “imagined communities,” subsequent

2. Political elites and academics have fiercely debated the origins of the civil war (see Dinerman 2006; Pitcher 2002).

3. Ministry of Planning and Development. 2010. Poverty and well-being in Mozambique: third national assessment. Maputo.

4. Following the increased popularity of televised film violence, some diviners introduced “television” into their divinatory practices, which they refer to as “watching video or television,” drawing on notions of *imagem* (image) and *filme* (film) from the Portuguese.

5. In Gorongosa, as in other sociocultural contexts, procreation is a marker of the transition from childhood—or, more broadly, youth—to adulthood (cf. Last 2000; Turner 1967).

analyses of the role of mass media in contemporary societies have suggested that people's access to different media fosters new ways of imagining the community and the world (Appadurai 1996). Along these lines, Indian films (romance, melodrama, music) have provided young viewers in Nigeria the potential to imagine alternative worlds to local traditional life (Larkin 2003); following similar genres in Niger, foreign television dramas have been implicated in the "emergence of an ideology of love," whereby young women watch tele-dramas to learn feminine models of conduct and young men watch them to learn masculine ones (Masquelier 2009:205). In Egypt, television serials have played a role in generating national sentiments and in shaping national imaginations (Abu-Lughod 2005). Other studies have examined how Nigerian and Ghanaian films (Pentecostal Christian genres) give rise to new practices of religious mediation (Meyer 2003). These studies have contributed to remapping the diversity of media worldwide (Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod, and Larkin 2002; Saul and Austen 2010).

The current focus on mass media technologies and their encompassing global imaginings, however, was accompanied by a certain uneasiness that propelled some anthropologists to argue that "the analytical coupling of the imagination to processes of globalization has often obscured the ways that imaginative acts are in fact materially grounded in social activities" (Weiss 2002:93). Other authors have similarly criticized the primacy ascribed to mass media technologies in social mediation, as this tends to neglect existing cultural practices of mediation (Mazzarella 2004). It has been indicated in some regions that as the imbrications of media technologies with existing cultural institutions of mediation become salient, the media technologies are kept in check, while myriad local rituals of revelation and life transition become enlarged (Behrend 2003; Englund 2007; Meyer 2003; Pye 2012; Seremetakis 2009). Additionally, the centrality of the body in practices of mediation and in the intricacies of mimicry (Downey 2010) turn the body into an unpredictable site and embodiment into an indeterminate process (Csordas 1993), thus highlighting that mass media messages are not unproblematically transmitted and absorbed (Spitulnik 1993:296). Thus, people's involvements with mass media technologies defy simplistic cause-effect reasoning.

Mainstream anthropology of media, nevertheless, is notably lacking in terms of comprehensive studies focused on children and young people. While some anthropologists have recognized the growing importance of young people's consumption of media technologies (Schwartzman 2001:10), the topic remains largely uncharted, let alone when it relates to the popularity of media violence among young people in non-Western societies. There is no disputing that debates about media violence in the twentieth century have been predominantly American/Anglo-Saxon ones (Groebel 2001:256). The need for analysis and debate becomes urgent as the absence of serious anthropological studies persists, even when the popularity of media violence is a visible feature of various societies, including those with recent memories of war that are dealing with

complex legacies of violent conflict and trauma (Groebel 2001; Igreja 2014; Richards 1996).

The few anthropological analyses of the popularity of media violence among young people have tended to assume a linear approach, whereby young people appropriate film violence "to create new cultures of masculinity and violence" (Appadurai 1996:40). For instance, in the former war-affected Sierra Leone, rebel leaders used film violence as recruitment and training aids for young recruits, while the youths themselves interpreted their experiences of film violence as offering positive "learning" opportunities (Richards 1996; cf. Larkin 2003; Masquelier 2009; Strelitz and Boshoff 2008). Furthermore, a study among the Waorani communities in the Amazon suggested that film violence contributed to the production of new masculine fantasies (High 2010:760). These types of inferences have shown less of the multiple subjectivities of youths (men and women) and the multiple ramifications of masculinity and femininity (Connell 1995). Perhaps the most noticeable limit in the anthropology of media violence and young people is the lack of comprehensive engagement with the social practices of youths, as culturally and historically defined, and proper articulation of the complexity of violence. Violence is rooted in the local and global conditions of life (Gledhill 1994:160; Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004; Whitehead 2007); it is implicated in carving uncertain futures, as violence also sediments meaningful local experiences, so that, as suggested through the analysis of modern warfare, participants can "explicitly appeal to tradition as a defining element of their violent practice" (Whitehead 2004:59).

Salões de Filmes and Experiences of Watching Film Violence

The *salões* are profit seeking and therefore strategically placed in the local markets. When compared with my earlier observations from the mid-1990s, markets have become vibrant places where global commodities are traded, from Chinese shoes and underwear to dried fish, petrol, pirated DVDs, and alcohol, which is sold in numerous small but loud dance clubs in and around the market and the *salões*. The emergence of the *salões* has expanded these informal markets and created new jobs for some of the local youth, putting cash in their hands that is instrumental to extending their social spaces and intensifying their struggles to demarcate their spheres of autonomy.

The interiors of the *salões* are filled with wooden benches that seat 4–6 persons each. The television is linked to a DVD player and amplifying speakers. The sound is loud so that even distant passersby can hear the gunshots and screams in the films. The owners of the *salões* are mostly adult men but include a few adult women, most of whom migrated from urban areas in search of business opportunities or came to the district as migrant laborers working for the Mozambican state. The *salões* have diverse names, either Portuguese or chi-Gorongosi: Club of the Bad Indian, Club Pay Straight-

away, Matchessa (“meeting room,” in chi-Gorongosi), and so on; other *salões* are named after their owners. The on-site managers of the *salões* are young men. The entrance fee for the *salões* is affordable; there are no timetables, and viewing depends on the availability of an audience, which often is predominantly male. In this neoliberal period, Mozambican authorities do not regulate the operation of *salões*. As in other African countries (Larkin 2008), cinema was used as a propaganda medium in post-independence Mozambique as part of the government’s socialist revolutionary program, and films regarded as subversive were forbidden (Diawara 1992; for state control of media in socialist Cuba, see Pertierra 2011). These regulations impacted urban areas where the Portuguese had built formal cinemas, whereas the *salões* emerged without restrictions on viewer age or gender or on the films presented.

Various *salões* managers told me that attempts to show the romance stories, historical films, or musicals that audiences elsewhere in Africa and in Latin America enjoy (Abu-Lughod 2005; Larkin 2008; Masquelier 2009; Pertierra 2011) failed due to lack of local interest. I watched many action films with scenes of violence, and several could be classified, according to official ratings in Western countries, as containing extreme violence (Sargent et al. 2002).⁶ My young interlocutors often identified films by country of origin: they were American, Chinese, Nigerian, and so on. The centers of film production in these countries have different norms and styles, but what the young viewers I spoke with cared about most was that the films portrayed war, action, and other types of violence. It has been observed elsewhere that “action heroes and pop stars are the favorite role models among children” (Groebel 2001:263); in Gorongosa, the heroes were Jean-Claude Van Damme, Jackie Chan (cf. High 2010), and Boyka.⁷ Many films were in English, some were in Hindi or Mandarin, and only a few were dubbed in Portuguese.

As I hung around in the *salões*, I became acquainted with the various young boys and girls who assiduously watched these films. One of my interlocutors, who called himself Trêsbalas (“Three bullets,” 9 years old), had stopped studying and sold secondhand clothes in the market to sustain himself and help support his two sisters and physically disabled mother. Although young, Trêsbalas had a body that was impressively well developed; he said this was the result of carrying heavy loads of clothes in and out of the market. When clients were not around, Trêsbalas himself became a client at the *salões*, where we talked about his film appetites. “I watch war films because I want to go into military life,” he told me. “I want to join the

Mozambican army to become a soldier” (cf. Richards 1996). When asked what he was learning from the war films, he told me, “I learn *talentos*.” He further clarified: “I learn capoeira, karate, and at home we practice in the bush with some military toys with my brothers.” I asked whom he meant by “we.” “At home I coach my friends to improve their *talentos*,” he explained, adding that it was important to practice, “otherwise the *talentos* can be whisked off from my body.” Asked about what films he disliked, Trêsbalas replied, “Romance and Chinese films.” Although the latter contain many scenes of violence, he said, “That thing does not enter in my body. I have watched several times, but the *talentos* do not enter in my body.”

I also talked with Muguduane (boy, 15), who was studying and working as an apprentice to repair broken televisions and DVD players. Unlike Trêsbalas, Muguduane showed a strong preference for Chinese films on the grounds that “there are things that I capture from these films.” I asked Muguduane what he meant. “*Estes filmes revelam coisas* [these films reveal things],” he answered. “I capture *talentos*, and then I put in practice. These films help to prepare my body, as I always manage to capture the secret of doing somersaults. When people provoke me,” he said, “I do somersaults, and they often get frightened and avoid further provocations.”

These conversations demonstrated that while the young boys shared a preference for action films with scenes of violence, they diverged on the specific types of violence they appreciated. Their preferences were sometimes informed by individual experiences, while at other times, they were embedded in local cultural imaginaries. For instance, unlike Trêsbalas and Muguduane, a boy named Bruceloi (13), a full-time student, said he did not like war films “because my grandparents tell me that the civil war killed many people here. So I don’t want to repeat that disaster.”⁸ Yet Bruceloi appreciated Bruce Lee films because Lee “does not use weapons; he likes the exchange of punches, and the *talentos* enter in my body.” When asked how *talentos* entered his body, Bruceloi indicated that it was difficult to explain. Switching to chi-Gorongosi, he said, “You have to do *ku phulika*,” a term that means both “concentration” and “submission.” Interestingly, “concentration” was consistent with my observations of the postures of *salões* audiences, whereas the attitude of “submission” was not obvious. It is noteworthy that these bodily dispositions and attitudes are reminiscent of those required by *gamba* spirits to penetrate their hosts during healing rituals; but in these healing sessions, the word and the

6. I noted more than 50 action film titles, including *Eaten Alive* (dir. Umberto Lenzi, 1980, horror), *Bullets, Blood and a Fistful of Ca\$h* (dir. Sam Akina, 2006, action/crime), *Black Belt* (dir. Shunichi Nagasaki, 2007, action/drama), *The Art of War* (dir. Christian Duguay, 2000, action), *Superfights* (dir. Lucas Lowe, 1995, action), *Persecution* (dir. Sheldon Lettich, 1991, action/crime/drama), and *Bandit Queen* (dir. Shekhar Kapur, 1994, action/drama).

7. Director Isaac Florentine, 2006, action/crime/drama.

8. I first met Bruceloi at a *tchiwara* session; his grandfather, annoyed, told him and his two siblings, “The goat that stays behind is waiting for the flogging.” The imagery of violence in the saying was a warning to Bruceloi, who, on the previous night, had returned home late from the *salões* and had claimed to have been beaten by a ghost (*shipoco*). Proverbs such as this one are used to compel young people like Bruceloi to obey their elders and to preempt disobedience in others, while attempting to instill the moral rules that stealing is abhorrent, uncontrolled sex is dangerous, walking around late invites *shipoco* home, and violence enforces discipline among insubordinate and unrepentant youngsters (Igreja 2003; cf. Last 2000).

action it is purported to produce are taken for granted. Bruceloi's allusion to *ku phulika* advanced my knowledge of existing vocabularies of mediation by spirit possession, even though I considered myself already very familiar with them. I confirmed through the ritual specialists that *ku phulika* was indeed an old term that refers to that moment of stillness in which spirits inspect the bodies of hosts they seek to possess; it is seldom spoken because it refers to the responsibility, even if scanty, of the host in ritual spirit possession episodes. Bruceloi's use of the notion of *ku phulika* helped to pinpoint the dialectics and multiple temporalities involved in ongoing social transformations: certain local categories rendered meaningful experiences of watching film violence, while film violence offered an occasion to bring to consciousness local categories that had been seemingly buried through the repetitions of everyday life or that were kept out of sight by ritual specialists as a matter of knowledge protection. While the example refers to a microscale reality, it contributes to cumulative evidence of the points of intersection between young people and their adult guardians in interpretations of the hidden powers of television. In this case, such multilayered analysis reiterates the need to resist attempts at encapsulating social change within linear temporal processes whereby new social practices purportedly replace or extinguish old ones.

Bruceloi attributed his preference for Bruce Lee to the hero's fighting style. "Bruce Lee does not use weapons, and since I am a person that sometimes moves around and I don't have a weapon, if someone provokes me then I can respond without a weapon," he explained. "For example, when I arrive in the city, it is full of bandits that provoke people, so I will defend myself without weapons." This view implied that some of the films presented scenes of violence that the young viewers imagined as typical of city life. Therefore, watching violent films allowed them to prepare their bodies and anticipate ways of navigating the city or, in the case of Trêsbaldas, the army.

Unlike my young male interlocutors, young girls showed appreciation for films with story lines related to jealousy and witchcraft, which also included scenes of cannibalism. Several young girls mentioned what is considered locally to be a Nigerian film, *Chimureta*, although it is in fact a Tanzanian film called *Shumileta*.⁹ Robina (10 years old) described the story: "There is a *dama* [lady] named *Chimureta*. She has a husband, but she envied the husband of her female friend. *Chimureta* killed her friend in order to flirt with the husband of the deceased lady. Subsequently, *Chimureta* also killed her lover and ate his heart." These types of films were said to reveal the danger of people harboring feelings of envy, excessive goodness, and ambition; these feelings and attitudes have sometimes been implicated in the causes and effects of witchcraft (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999; Geschiere 1997). In this case, films such as *Chimureta* have been purveyors of images and ideas about occult practice while also distinguishing moral from immoral violence (Meyer 2003), about which some of my adult inter-

locutors expressed serious concern. Yet for viewers like Robina, these films contained *talentos*, which, once embodied, were instrumental to visually detecting ill-intentioned people and effectively navigating the social complexities of the evolving local life.

The reasons expressed by Trêsbaldas, Muguduane, Bruceloi, and Robina for their choice of films provided entry into the notion of *talentos* and, more broadly, insight into their viewing experiences. Their explanations indicated an understanding of *talentos* as a set of hidden techniques barred from straightforward acquisition. It also suggested viewing to encompass "more than the visual act of watching television" (Mankekar 1993:548). The body was required to play a central role through proper concentration and submission, although no one could guarantee the acquisition of *talentos* prior to watching film violence. These types of unpredictable or "indeterminate" involvements of the body (Csordas 1993) overlap but also contrast with the apparently more predictable processes of "copying" (Larkin 1997), or "embodied learning," from television observed in other cultural settings (Masquelier 2009). The details exposing the unpredictability of embodied learning in Gorongosa are important in demonstrating some of the microdynamics that sustain youth groups and their hierarchies.

My young interlocutors also indicated in diverse ways how external entities have agency to penetrate a person's body or not. *Talentos* appeared as agents that could stay with one's body or go elsewhere; "*ku phulika*," as a local cultural category, could apparently enhance the individual's ability to properly grasp film violence and thereby acquire *talentos*. These accounts of attempting to access *talentos* from images of violence resonated with how the broader community explains certain ways of accessing power that involve spirits, spirit possession, and dreams (cf. Lambek 1993; Masquelier 2001). In the social world of the Gorongosas, as observed elsewhere (Keane 2005; Pels 1998; Spyer 1998:5), certain tangible and intangible objects can have mutually permeable features and wield immense power over persons and collectivities; in this case, even if not directly spoken about in such terms, television and film appeared as forms of spirits, while *talentos* appeared as forms of spirit possession. Thus, the narratives of my young interlocutors defy attempts to establish straightforward links between watching films, acquiring new techniques, and changing one's attitude in the world. Watching film violence becomes more expansive by considering the existing cultural conceptions of powerful knowledge, particularly the role of revelation through spirits, divinations, and healing rituals.

Rituals of Revelation, Postwar Repair, and Young People

In anthropological studies, "revelation" is often linked to religious processes whose agents are priests, prophets, and healers or Gods, spirits, and ritual objects (Comaroff and Comaroff

9. Produced by Mussa Banzi Film, 2005, horror.

1997; Turner 1967). The global circulation of diverse objects comes with heightened processes of cultural appropriation whereby material things are integrated and consolidated as repositories of power that may open novel spaces for negotiating agency (Keane 2005:191; Spyer 1998:3). For instance, some consumers in India have suggested that television serials encourage superstitious practices (Mankekar 1999); and around the world, a range of media technologies have given rise to new practices of religious mediation that reveal the invisible ill intentions of allegedly profane agents (Behrend 2003; Englund 2007; Meyer 2003). These studies contribute to complicating contemporary analyses that tend to strictly equate mass media technologies with a sense of unparalleled modernity in specific localities (Seremetakis 2009), thus underlining the need to contextualize audience responses in relation to diverse social activities, artifacts, and interpretations (Edgar 1977:88; Moores 1993:117) so that a complex anthropological perspective can account for the negotiations and tensions, the gains and losses, and the reinforcement, diffusion, and fractures of existing power structures that arise with the reception of new media technologies.

Within this context, the arrival of televised film violence in Gorongosa was preceded and shaped by the social activities in which young people participate, some of them under the rule of adults and elders, who are intended to provide moral guidance to young people. The *tchiwara* is a form of home-based teaching under the elders' ruling.¹⁰ It includes life-transition rituals (childhood/youth to adulthood) and sometimes involves disciplinary violence as part of conflict resolution.¹¹ Under *magaliro wapa nhumba* (rules to live at home), church leaders teach young people to behave properly and be fearless in fighting Satan (Igreja and Dias-Lambranca 2009). There is also formal schooling, to which, in the postcolonial period, more

boys and girls have had access. Yet meaningful to understanding the practice of watching film violence and self-assertion is the local practice of mediation by *gamba* spirits. These spirits intrusively possess and afflict young people, in particular, young girls. *Gamba* spirits afflict and speak through the bodies of people who were allegedly involved in or related to serious wartime violations. When they will strike cannot be predicted, and even once they assault, it cannot be predicted that the host will reach the possession trance state to bear witness to wartime violations. The randomness of *gamba* spirit possession nevertheless constitutes a major change in the rituals of revelation when compared with the *dzoca* ancestral spirits that selectively possess people with histories of *madzoca* ritual healing in their families (Igreja, Dias-Lambranca, and Richters 2008).

In a state of trance, the *gamba* spirits use new ritual objects that actualize war violence. The possessed persons holds a bayonet (*ntchorora*) from a Kalashnikov, exhibits violent bodily gestures, and, in tandem with his or her audience, screams and is noisy in ways reminiscent of the film violence projected at *salões de filmes*; yet, unlike the *gamba* sessions that often occur in the night, the *salões de filmes* follow no timetable. During *gamba* spirit sessions, the participants sing songs of war, persecution, and resistance; they sing of *ku toera mabota* and of violence to end abuses and impunity among the war survivors: "When the cock goes crazy, behead him."¹² The afflicting spirit is violent toward the host's kin, and these violent acts are interpreted as a challenge to the authority of the elders who attempted to conceal family disdain and abandonment of children and acts of persecution and murder committed by the patrikin of the spirit's host. The violence then compels the host's kin to account for these alleged evil deeds and, in this regard, suggests the idea of revelation as a form of continuity as well as a struggle for change. The audience often sides with the *gamba* spirit and acknowledges the spirit's violence as legitimate. Sometimes *gamba* spirits exhibit destructive violence, and the patrikin of the spirit's host have to run away to escape. The *gamba* healer warns the spirit and audience that violent punishment—to the extent of killing the alleged culprits—only becomes violence for its own sake (*ku nerana, nerana*) without resolving the conflict. *Gamba* spirits attempt to dissipate violence in the broader community through feelings and acts of vendetta for wartime violations (Igreja 2015b). In this respect, they encapsulate both positive and negative aspects, expressing moral and immoral forms of violence in ways similar to the notion of *talentos*.

The dynamic of gender relations in these mediation practices is noteworthy, as young women are the focal point of *gamba* spirits, and film violence is predominantly consumed by young men, which suggests overlapping and distinct processes of enhancing self-assertion. Yet the idea of diverse con-

10. While the practice of *tchiwara* was disrupted during the civil war, various families tried to reestablish it in the postwar era. Due to the scarcity of wood, however, and the availability of electricity, which allows for watching films, drinking in bars, or studying in the evenings, *tchiwara* does not often unfold around the bonfire. Some people do not use the word "*tchiwara*" but still look to the elders for control of the young people.

11. In marriage ceremonies, before the fiancé takes on his fiancée, the parents of the fiancée sit down on a mat. A young boy holds a ritual object while pointing it at the girl's parents and loudly utters, "*Ifa bambu, ifa mai* [Die father, die mother]." The ritual objects in these scenes have changed over time. Portuguese missionaries in the 1930s forbade the use of spears and machetes. During my field research, from the 1990s onward, I saw various tools used. My interlocutor Bruceloi was given a cooked chicken leg with which to perform the act in his neighbor's marriage (January 10, 2009). In another marriage ceremony, a *gamba* healer's cousin (Muguduane) was given a bayonet (March 6, 2010). The ritual reinforces bravery and contains violence linked to the loss of a girl's virginity (cf. Girard 1977). The loss of a girl's virginity results in the girl's parents' embodiment of a potentially deadly illness, which requires a cleansing ritual (*ku tussira mutombo*).

12. The "cock" refers to adults or people in positions of power whose misbehavior may legitimately deserve punishment, even death.

ceptions of gender as expressed through masculinity and femininity cannot be discarded (Connell 1995). In Gorongosa, the gender divide is sometimes contextually blurred, and fluid understandings of masculinity and femininity are expressed. For instance, *gamba* spirits (male) possess female bodies, and the emerging power can discipline both men and women (young people, adults, and elders). Female hosts, over time, end up domesticating their male aggressive spirits into docility and respect (*makodzo*), which locally are also signs of femininity.¹³ These fluid gender relations suggest interwoven processes whereby masculine/violence is transformed into feminine/violence, and masculinity/femininity becomes, even if transiently, indistinguishable. In this regard, neither *gamba* spirits nor film violence shapes just one or another human characteristic; it shapes both masculinity and femininity in complex ways. These gender divisions and intersections were also implicated in the evolving social relations in the *salões*, not so much in the sense, as observed around the world, that the primary audience of film violence is male (Twitchell 1989) but more in the sense that boys and girls, as presented above, showed preference for different genres of film violence. Young men and women, however, were united in their views that film violence was not primarily about entertainment.

Entertainment as a Cultural Phenomenon and Film Violence as Revelation

The majority of psychological and experimental studies on the popularity of media violence among young viewers are driven by the assumption that children cannot distinguish reality from fantasy (Davies 1997) and that films, while regarded as fantasies for entertaining audiences, can harm. The psychological theory commonly used to explain the dangers of media violence is through learning theory, which is based on an imitation mechanism (Bandura, Ross, and Ross 1963). The theory suggests that by watching images of violent models, young viewers acquire “cognitive aggressive scripts”; in turn, these scripts are behaviorally enacted in social situations (Huesmann and Eron 1986) or evoke emotionally aggressive thoughts (Bushman and Geen 1990). One shortfall of this theory is its failure to explain absence of mimicry, that is, young people who watch similar dosages of film violence but do not enact aggressive behavior. The theory also neglects “intertextual sources through which meaning is constituted” (Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod, and Larkin 2002:6). In settings such as Gorongosa, there are multiple social practices that are normatively engulfed by imaginaries of violence.

In spite of these limitations, the dominant view of effect studies and beyond is that media violence negatively impacts young people’s well-being—that it causes violent behavior,

increases acceptability of violence in everyday life, and provokes nightmares and unusual fear, which then contribute to emotional instability (AAP 2009; Bushman and Huesmann 2001). In this regard, international bodies such as the World Health Organization (WHO) have appealed globally to shield young viewers from media violence (WHO 2002), while still overlooking the broader sociocultural environment and activities of young people.

The owners and managers of the *salões* often told me that the films shown “*não são reais* [are not real].” They are, one explained, “aimed at *divertir os putos e as damas* [entertaining the kids and their girlfriends].” Not one *salões* manager affirmed that young people acquire aggressive scripts from watching film violence. Yet their views in relation to entertainment seemed to neglect local understandings and experiences of entertainment. In chi-Gorongosi, a proxy translation of the word “entertainment” is *ku tsandzaia*, which relates to movement, such as “to sing and to dance” (*ku embera* and *ku dvina*) or “to laugh” (*ku seka*). The word *ku tsandzaia* also describes children’s play, swimming in the river, or playing soccer. Once I asked Bruceloi about participating in the *salões* for enjoyment. He blatantly said, “To have fun, we just play soccer. In the *salões*, we pay, and if the person’s body is ready, the film delivers a lot of things.” Another interlocutor, a girl named Neranga (15 years old), who sold snacks outside the *salões*, said, “When we play around, we see the same things, but when I watch *Chimureta*, my body detects bad things.” To clarify, Neranga said that after watching the film *Chimureta*, she met her cousin with a friend and, after staring into the friend’s eyes, advised her cousin, “Your friend is worthless.” She said that some days later, “*Dito e feito, a miuda engarrafou-lhe o namorado* [in fact, the girl bewitched my cousin’s boyfriend]. Since then, my cousin does not get a new boyfriend.” Neranga said she was almost certain that “there is *cuxecuxe* [witchcraft] there.”¹⁴

Through my participation in various *salões*, I observed that audiences stayed silent in a way similar to the moments of stillness preceding spirit possession, the name for which Bruceloi seemingly rescued from near oblivion; when I watched films in urban centers, however, the audiences often clapped their hands in appreciation of the film’s entertaining qualities. I never saw similar reactions in the *salões* of Gorongosa. Thus, watching film violence among young people did not mechanically suggest “entertainment” in the local cultural sense; for the young boys and girls, film violence allowed them to access *talentos* instrumental to addressing different threats and harms.

In Gorongosa, revelation is expressed through the connection of two terms: *ku uona* (to see) and *ku uonera* (to reveal

13. These reconfigurations of gender relations can also be observed among Christian Pentecostal groups whose Christian male devotees can be seen performing female activities (Igreja and Dias-Lambranca 2009).

14. Neranga’s assertions are worth noting because her suspicion of witchcraft is in conformity with the logic of tense social relations. However, she mingles in potentially dangerous relations as she invokes the power to detect witches when, in principle, only diviners and Christian prophets can detect witches.

something hidden). *Ku uonera* has the additional meaning of seeing something external to the subject with the goal of inspecting its condition. The other meaning of *ku uonera* refers to the embodiment of, or a way of seeing with the whole body, a certain behavior, technique, or event associated with power and danger. This latter meaning is exemplified by Bruceloi's and Neranga's respective assertions of body readiness and of the body as a medium for detecting bad things.

Following the views of my young interlocutors, film violence was not presented as entertaining, nor was film violence simply a mechanism for distributing *talentos* to the audience. *Talentos* were produced in similar ways to the process of *ku uonera* and required *ku phulika*, which were also imbricated with the cultural experiences of "to enter," "not to enter," "to capture," "body readiness," "floating around," and "to take away." In this regard, although they all watched violent films, they did not all access the revelation of *talentos*. Sometimes the revelation "entered" the body, other times the young viewers themselves attempted "to capture" the revelation (e.g., Muguduane); sometimes they succeeded, and in other instances they failed (e.g., Trêsbalas). These diverse possibilities also suggest the subjective dimensions that shape television watching, reflecting the view of Purnima Mankekar's (1993) interlocutors in India that meaningful ways of watching television required "bhaav" (loosely, 'feeling' or 'emotion') . . . in one's heart" (554). It could also be that not everyone could access the techniques of violence from the films in Gorongosa because, following Greg Downey's (2010) study of capoeira, "imitation is a challenge" (28). As a way to compensate for the failure to directly access the revelations, the young viewers had to submit to other young people or other sources of power.

I did not witness Trêsbalas mentoring others as he described because the training sessions were random. "If the master allows it," he said, "then I inform the other guys to show up for the training." By "master," he meant Jackie Chan, or "Jai," as he is locally known. "Jai appears in my dreams to authorize the training sessions." This continuation of film violence by other means and the fact that Trêsbalas's followers accepted the logic of dreams as regulating some of their interactions indicates that Trêsbalas and his followers were operating neither contra culture nor within the confines of their culture. It confirms instead the observation that diverse new technologies around the globe "are all being taken up and transformed in novel and not always obviously consistent ways" (Boddy 2013:464).

Other young people accessed revelations through coproductions with peers, as I saw several times when some of the young viewers displayed *talentos* to attract my attention so that I would take pictures of them. I saw, too, how some of them turned to the others' body movements—especially those emulating Bruce Lee, Van Damme, or Boyka—to copy their movements and seek confirmation of whether they had properly embodied the *talentos*. These forms of coproduction and learning enhance the young viewers' sense of self-assertion through "a shared idiom of meaning" (Whitehead 2004:6), a recourse to culturally recognized practices of rev-

elation and power such as dreams and *ku phulika* as well as broader processes of power relations such as "the capacity to nominate others as equal or unequal" (Parkin 1982:xlvi). Thus, peer transmission and learning contribute to creating and maintaining hierarchies of power and submission through access to revelations among themselves.

Struggles for Domination and Defiance

There are few doubts that generational conflicts and struggles have long occurred in human societies. What social scientists and anthropologists, in particular, have insisted on is the need for studies that account for how young people, as culturally and historically situated agents, sometimes become involved in unpredictable violent or peaceful struggles and often have mediated continuity and change in the midst of disturbing predicaments (Abbink 2005; Boyden 2007; Durham 2000; Honwana 2012; Honwana and de Boeck 2005). In Gorongosa, there is a proverb that conveys a sense of the inevitability of generational conflict, "The banana tree dies because of generating bananas" (i.e., it is the offspring who kill their parents). Stories of occasional attempts by young people to disrupt the authority of the elders on matters of sexuality and arranged marriage are known.

In a *tchiwara* session in which I participated, there was heated dispute over the illicit deflowering of a girl allegedly by Muguduane. He denied the accusation while also arguing that the girl went after him. Muguduane's elder uncle used a known local proverb, "The pumpkin does not roll in the direction of the pig," meaning that even if the girl (pumpkin) had consented to sexual intercourse, Muguduane (pig) was responsible for the illicit act. Another uncle threatened violence if Muguduane insisted on "wasting the buttocks of the old men," given that they had sat for several hours while he refused liability. The enactment of violence was considered legitimate because Muguduane's defiance was putting the girl's parents at risk; this predicament could still be mitigated by the *ku tussira mutombo* cleansing ritual, but Muguduane was delaying the process.

Muguduane's defiance was also an occasion for the elders to assert their historical knowledge of the young people's tricks. During the dispute, the grandmother of the deflowered girl mentioned the defiant behavior of some young men involved in labor migration in the neighboring cities around Gorongosa and in Zimbabwe in the 1940s. It has been suggested that engagement in labor migration to Zimbabwe among, for instance, young Chikunda men during the colonial era "enhanced their sense of masculinity and of control over their destiny" (Isaacman and Isaacman 2004:303). However, the example presented by the grandmother of the deflowered girl, backed by other elders, demonstrated that a continuous struggle, rather than control over their destinies as a fait accompli, resulted from labor migration, given that control over social reproduction remained in the hands of the elders back in the village. While away working, some young men

would send remittances for village elders to seek and maintain their fiancées, yet in most cases, the elders, by their own initiative, arranged fiancées for their absent migrant sons. On their return, some young men resisted the arranged marriages, but the social pressure to accept was so enormous that to uphold their disobedience, they had to feign madness or become very aggressive so as to render themselves antisocial and be left alone to pursue their own plans. The violence in these cases was intermittent and did not create major preoccupations in the communities, but the grandmother told this story to illustrate what, in the elders' perceptions, were negative attitudes among the young people and to render legitimate the elders' own efforts to enforce subordination and respect.

As the grandmother finished, another elder in the session added, "When a blind person threatens someone, it means that there is something there. He stepped on a stone." This conveyed the belief that young people had become defiant because they had reverted to other sources of knowledge and support that did not exist before. To blame, the elder emphasized, were the gatherings in the *salões* to watch film violence.

Tensions were heightened between adult guardians and the younger generations in the context of the civil war and postwar events. Increasingly, young people such as Muguduane have vowed to choose their own *damas* (girlfriends) or boyfriends, a concept that contrasts with the *tchiwara* (e.g., arranged husbands or wives) and to engage in uncontrolled sex before and outside of wedlock in spite of fears of pollution and the financial consequences of divorce. The adult guardians' role has also been visibly contested because some young people chose to work on their own in the markets or to continue their formal studies instead of entering prematurely into marital agreements.

Most importantly, the increasingly common social path followed by young people puts postwar generations in direct exchanges with each other in a level of interaction that had only been seen, at least in recent history, during the civil war. Sometimes these exchanges involve disagreements, rivalries, brawls, "provocations," and attempts at forging consensus. Successful engagement in these interpersonal ventures requires a growing sense of self-assertion, which, aside from the film violence, only the *gamba* phenomenon appears to foster, albeit in a circumscribed manner. In this context, film violence is implicated in complex ways and in a broad set of relations among young people themselves.

Talentos, Masculinities, and Containment of Violence

Almost all my young interlocutors had experienced successful use of *talentos* in everyday life. Muguduane said he once "managed to scare away bandits that tried to steal in my parents' house"; Bruceloi told of how once, when watching a film, a guy stepped on his foot: "It hurt me, but he did not give an apology. Instead, he told me, 'Piss off.'" Offended, Bruceloi proceeded to "kick his ass." "He tried to fight back," he said. "I restrained him and put him down in the floor.

Everyone applauded because this guy often provokes other guys' *damas*."

As Ruth and Verlon Stone (1981:217) observed in their study of music events, individuals' interpretations of experiences are not necessarily identical. In this study, there were also differences among the young viewers. Unlike Bruceloi, other young people related to film violence as a source of *talentos* used to contain violence.

For instance, Muguduane said that one of the greatest revelations he embodied was acquired from the speech of Van Damme's coach in a scene from a film. The coach told Van Damme, "Do not use karate when you are on edge; you have to empty your mind." "Now, as soon as there is a *briga* [bickering]," Muguduane said, "I empty my mind. I speak to the person, he understands, and—*prontos* [that's it]—it finishes." Trésbalas described how once while walking with one of his sisters, she was publicly humiliated by a suitor, and his friends agitated him to punish the troublemaker. "I was burning inside my body," he said. "But once I had a dream, and Master Jai told me to be careful with *talentos* because *talentos* are dangerous and can harm people." In keeping with his dream, he said, "Twenty-four hours after the incident, I searched for the troublemaker, and I told him to be respectful with my sister. That's it, the thing ended like this [peacefully]." By embodying the teachings of Van Damme and enacting the dream of Jackie Chan, respectively, Trésbalas and Muguduane differed from some of their peers, who, in those situations, were stirred to revenge for humiliating and violent provocations. Instead, Trésbalas and Muguduane entered into dialogue with their troublemakers, thereby demonstrating that they could be self-assertive while showing self-control and in this way contain violence. These cases suggest that masculinity does not refer to fixed character types but to configurations of practice generated in particular situations (Connell 1995:81). Muguduane was even more specific in his reflections about masculinity and violence. "To be a man is not to beat others," he said. "I make others understand just with a *papo* [chat] when they are wrong." When I asked what kind of *papo*, he said, "Sometimes a man has to let himself be taken away by the wind" (i.e., to be tolerant).

The Multiple Ramifications of *Talentos* and Self-Assertion

While I took the younger viewers' voices seriously, I recognize that people's motives are usually plural and often fluctuating (Asad 2003:199). Thus, their answers to my questions did not exhaust the array of meanings that rendered their discourses and actions intelligible. For instance, their experience of using *talentos* was often in the context of self-defense. Yet self-defense also implied a prior aggressor who might have also used *talentos*, although everyone remained silent about using *talentos* to voluntarily instigate brawls. Besides the need to avoid making the children's voices "unimpeachable" (James 2007), a closer analysis showed that the silence was com-

plemented by the young people's everyday interactions, which were also constitutive of their voices and agency.

The role of violent films in triggering hyperarousal was reported by Rui (boy, 12 years old), a gate sentinel at a newly opened Chinese shop. "When I finish watching a film," Rui said, "if someone provokes me, there will be war right away." Rui's position could also be explained in terms of the excitation transfer theory (Zillmann 1971), which suggests that previous experiences (violence) can remain as residual stimuli, which, in the face of new, similar, or even different stimuli (film violence) can trigger aggressive behavior. Rui told me that once he ended up in the police station for beating another boy who had provoked him because of a *dama*. Yet when the police commander heard both sides of the fight, he acquitted Rui, saying, "*Porra, o puto tem razão* [Damn it, the kid is right]." Rui's case conveyed film-induced arousal but without serious consequences.

During my fieldwork in February 2011, there was one case that perhaps supports the idea of media violence triggering aggression, but the link is still tenuous. The case concerned a male youngster (Logan, 19) who was accused of violently killing another young boy during a dispute in the market. Logan was a vendor in the market as well as a client of the *salões*, where he watched a range of violent films. In February 2011, when he was accused of committing the crime, the film *Bullets, Blood and a Fistful of Ca\$h* was being shown repeatedly at the Salão Matchessa. The film begins with violent scenes. To illustrate the potential link between Logan's alleged crime and the film, I focus on just one scene in which a character named Cash saves his own life by violently grabbing the testicles of his powerful opponent. The ferocity of the act is graphically enhanced by showing the opponent jumping several inches from the floor after being grabbed. The film ends with both Cash and the main villain dead.

In my interview with Logan, he did not confirm having seen this film. On the day of the crime, Logan said, he had been drinking alcohol with his cousin, when the cousin became involved in a brawl with another young boy; Logan said he tried to stop the fight but soon became the target of violence himself, at which point he fainted. When he recovered, he said, he was in prison. He claimed that he only remembered up to the moment when he tried to contain the fight: "I never saw a *filme* [film] like this," he said, to my surprise, referring not to the film *Bullets, Blood and a Fistful of Ca\$h* but to the type of action that he was accused of. The Portuguese word "*filme*" (film) was used to describe uncanny events in everyday life. Over time, the young people coined the term "*mawane*" to name action films with scenes of violence as well as to describe brawls among themselves.¹⁵

15. When I visited Gorongosa in 2013, I learned that young people had coined new words to convey diverse contexts of violence, including "*mawashe*," "*maiguere*," and "*yogo*." Understanding of their meanings requires further ethnographic research.

Various witnesses I spoke to also related Logan's violent action in terms of a film. A young boy (11 years old) who witnessed the event said, "This film was heavy, people were fighting, and one boy was drunk. He got hold of the *materiais* [testicles] of the other and he pulled them, and the victim fell down and died on the way to the hospital."

In this case, neither the witnesses nor the police officers connected the crime to exposure to violent films, nor did they refer to it as a display of *talentos*, although, following Trêsbala's idea that *talentos* can be dangerous, it could be said that Logan's action constituted *ku nerana*, *nerana*, that is, violence for its own sake and not to resolve conflict. The witnesses instead linked Logan's case to binge drinking. In an interview, the police commander used anecdotal evidence indicating that there had not been an increase in criminal occurrences; instead, he said, there had been an increase in "nonintentional crimes." In these types of crime, the goal of the perpetrator was not to kill the victim, but in this case, the fight caused the death of one of the assailants.

Parents' Responses to Youngsters' Attraction to Film Violence

When the *salões de filmes* opened, the owners and managers spoke of entertainment for the local masses, while the young people and their adult guardians responded differently. These disputes highlighted the uncertainties evoked by "the autonomy of objects," as the *salões* and film violence created social potentials outside the sponsors' intentions to entertain (Larkin 2008:4; cf. Pels 1998). The children's parents and other adult guardians complained that "the *salões* do not have a fixed timetable" and that the film violence represented a continuum of violence. One parent said, "Children are playing with war, but war is not something to be watched, because it enters in the person's life and it spoils the person. Another parent asserted that "the films have secrets that are not for children; if the child has a weak head, *prontos*, we lose control over the child."

Linked to this idea of a "weak head," another parent told of how her daughter became convinced by a film that "Gorongosa is becoming the granary of witches." "I became annoyed," she said, "because I did not know that the films in the *salões* also show witches to our children. Witches will afflict our children." The idea that, in certain circumstances (e.g., when a viewer has a weak head), film violence can intrusively "enter" the body or that witches can become embodied in powerful ways was also expressed by the young viewers in this study, although in the case of the young viewers, this had positive connotations expressed through *talentos*.

During a focus group discussion with several community authorities and parents, I asked the participants whether their concerns regarding the effects of film violence were not exaggerated, given that violence was not alien to the young people, as exemplified by their participation in the ritual

healing of afflictions by *gamba* spirits and, more broadly, by recent wars and ongoing violence in the region. One participant responded that some of the local rituals involving violence aim to contain the spread of pollution in society. In contrast, televised films, he said, “show blood and people dying. These things stay in the head, and the person can start moving around *mbarara*, *mbarara* [disoriented].” Another added that “even at home, we do not give everything to the child.” When I asked why, he said, “It’s like the healer never gives all to his novice, otherwise the novice can overcome him.” This bespoke an understanding that certain forms of knowledge constitute power and are better kept at bay in young people’s everyday lives. In the elders’ perception, the films did not conceal any form of violence from young viewers: “*Revelam tudo* [They reveal all],” one parent said. Yet the various explanations of my young interlocutors regarding *talentos* conveyed a sense of their elusive quality so that violent imagery alone did not provide straightforward access to them.

I had asked Muguduane about the differences between the marital ritual in which he had participated while carrying a *gamba* healer’s bayonet and the act of watching televised film violence. His response was only partly consistent with the views of the parents in the focus group discussion—he agreed that the ceremony was important to save the fiancée’s life but added, “When I watch films, I might get *talentos* to prepare my body.” This suggests that some young people distinguished between the parricide ritual and other local forms of mediated violence as related to the social and political bodies, whereas they related *talentos* more to their own individual bodies (cf. Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987) and to forms of power that concerned them personally.

A Christian pastor from the newly established Kingdom of God Church also weighed in on the focus group discussion. The church had been established in the market and used speakers to amplify their message to compete with the *salões de films*. “We often hear that Renamo has soldiers in Maringué. When we see children playing war in the bush because of these films instead of learning with us the *magaliro wapa nhumba* [rules to live], we think that our children will join Renamo to continue the war,”¹⁶ the pastor said. “*Nkondo ati tchadiba muno* [we no longer want war here].”¹⁷

“The *salões* promote problems,” the region’s principal community leader said in Portuguese, to enthusiastic applause. “These kids no longer wait to be given a wife to marry; now they only say, ‘My girl,’ ‘My boy,’ and they quarrel because of that.” This position reflected in a more encompassing way the sense of rupture between the elders and the younger gen-

erations on matters of sexuality and marriage. As noted above, there is ongoing tension in postwar Gorongosa stemming from the elders’ attempts to tighten the mechanisms of social control and the young people’s growing efforts to assert their own vision of social life. The adult guardians in this study accused the *salões* of aggravating these tensions and divisions, given that they provided young people new meeting points where they could assert their creativity and *talentos*, *filmes*, and *mawane* could unfold.

Final Remarks: Revelation, *Talentos*, and Self-Assertion

Televised film violence increased in popularity among young people in Gorongosa in a period when the region was also experiencing a series of continuities and changes intensified by the protracted civil war, postwar developments, and the continuous threat of renewed political violence between government forces and Renamo. These changes placed Gorongosa at the crossroads of local and global forces and promoted the advent of young consumers of film violence and their opposition. While I recognize that the young people in this study lived in conditions of multiple scarcity, their creative puissance, everyday dealings, and what they told me did not convey a sense of being “stuck” (Abbink 2005; Honwana 2012); rather, their pursuit of *talentos* indicated their fearless struggle to fulfill diverse needs and to grow up in ways that take into account their own choices and interests.

Anthropological studies of media consumption have been anchored in modernity discourses that present film imagery as providing alternative worlds to diverse forms of local traditional life (Larkin 2008; Masquelier 2009). Specifically, media violence has been associated with new cultures of masculinity among young people (Appadurai 1996; High 2010; Richards 1996). In this study, a comprehensive analysis of the reception of film violence in Gorongosa shows a set of complex processes in which the floating boundaries of traditional and modern social practices are interwoven, and a less obvious and more tense and negotiated process of social change was evolving.

The owners and managers of the *salões* regarded film violence as entertaining, whereas the young viewers and their parents and other important adult guardians overlapped and diverged in their perceptions and experiences of it. These diverse perceptions and experiences speak of how film violence raised serious “doubts about the ability of human beings to maintain control over their meaning” (Pels 1998:99). Significantly, among the young viewers and their adult guardians in this study, the phenomenon of rituals of revelation, memories of war, and postwar developments played out both in converging and distancing these interlocutors. For the parents, the *salões* posed serious competition to the *tchiwara* or, more broadly, to traditional socialization processes. This competition, in effect, further eroded the elders’ control of

16. The pastor’s anxiety was materialized when, in October 2013, Gorongosa was again engulfed in a civil war between the Frelimo government and the Renamo armed wing.

17. Focus group discussion, February 16, 2009, Gorongosa.

the young people at a time when they were trying to restore or rehabilitate their authority following the civil war and in response to emerging challenges. The parents and adult guardians claimed that film violence reveals powerful knowledge, which, they argued, once lodged in the heads of the young viewers, could, without proper oversight, imperil social peace. Their view was not primarily that media violence is harmful and should be precluded from the lives of young people, as purported by mainstream psychological studies on the impact of media violence on young viewers (AAP 2009; Bushman and Huesmann 2001). Instead, they expressed a sense of loss of control over the lives of young people and the fear that the popularization of techniques of violence could lead, in a way, to a naïve acceptance of violence in everyday life. Also, for some parents, film violence was reminiscent of their wartime experiences and triggered memories of trauma and loss at a time when many wished to forget them.

In contrast, young people perceived some of the scenes in the films as containing hidden and potentially empowering forms of embodied knowledge. Thus, they watched film violence in search of revelations of *talentos*, amalgamations of new techniques of violence and domination and self-control and submission. Some psychological studies on the young viewers' motivations for watching film violence have suggested that they do so to vicariously experience aggression as an instrument to attain the justice-restoration goal (Cantor 1998). As the multiple voices of my young interlocutors attest, what mattered most was not the presumed fairness of the violent acts they witnessed but whether the actions carried the potential for the viewer to embody *talentos*.

Unlike psychological studies, philosophical reflections tend to attribute young viewers' attraction to violent films to attempts to address a sense of discontinuity and fragmentation associated with the social and cultural effacement of violence in Western modernity (Hansen-Miller 2011; Twitchell 1989). In spite of the official end of the civil war in Gorongosa and, more broadly, in Mozambique, there has not been an effacement of violence in everyday life. Ritual violence, televised film violence, and broader violence were experienced as variations of the same phenomenon. My interlocutors spoke of violence in ways that could be interpreted according to contemporary anthropological analysis that violence is a multifaceted phenomenon related to order and disorder (Abbink 2000; Lubkemann 2008; Whitehead 2007).

The embodiment of *talentos* has enabled the young viewers of film violence to be active participants in the evolving local processes of self-assertion. Before the *salôes*, attempts at self-assertion were made by individual young people who dared to present and abide by their own views of social life. Yet often these were sporadic acts, which did not cause major concern in the communities. The civil war caused unparalleled disruption, and large numbers of young people had to craft ways to survive on their own. Following the civil war, survivors attempted to silence and deny their violent experiences. The emergence of the *gamba* spirits and their manifestation

mainly through the bodies of young people (women) broke the silence and allowed for the revelation of some of the hidden ruptures between young people and their adult guardians (Igreja 2003). Overall, these experiences paved the way for a growing sense of self-assertion among young people, which was intensified through the reception of media violence and ideas about *talentos*.

The struggle to access *talentos* highlights the possibilities and limits of the body (Csordas 1993). The involvement of the body as a medium was sometimes reliable and other times failed the young viewers in their bid to access the revelations of *talentos*. While the *talentos* were implicated in highlighting ongoing processes of self-assertion (Appadurai 1996), in this specific cultural context, self-assertion was as much about acquiring and displaying new techniques of violence as it was about containing violence and domination among young people. In this sense, film violence both innovates and enhances existing practices of mediated violence, as it is not confined to the ritual session or mediated by local adults.

As the young people turn their attention to "dispersed and distant persons, values and events" (Weiss 2002:94) emerging through televised film violence, they do not completely turn their backs on "the here and now" (Crapanzano 2004:14) of Gorongosa cultural life. Some of them alluded to dreams in a way that suggested dreaming about Hollywood figures such as Jackie Chan or Van Damme was a *talento* similar to that of diviners whose work is empowered by spirits. These cultural dynamics restate the position that young people are, in their diverse cultural conceptualizations around the world, central to negotiating continuity and change (Durham 2000:114). As with the civil war, the *salôes* and film violence are salient because they mobilize young people en masse to act on their own and defend themselves, to employ new techniques to successfully flirt with *damas* or boyfriends, to defend their parents' property against thieves, and to solve problems instantaneously, either through physical violence or by containing its escalation.

In this regard, unlike findings that show a preference for media violence and a craving to be personally involved in aggression in non-Western settings (Groebel 2001), film violence and the embodiment of *talentos* in Gorongosa were more broadly implicated in the lives of the young viewers than merely reflecting an urge to engage in violence with others. Although police and other adult guardians expressed concern about the increase in crime among minors, and some of these guardians attributed the increase to the spread of violent films via the *salôes*, based on the diverse responses of young viewers in this study, I believe that it is premature to draw firm conclusions about the exact nature of this relation. Televised film violence has become implicated in local life in very complex ways. Instead of simply entertaining or promoting gratuitous violence, film violence reveals *talentos*, which enhance a growing sense of self-assertion among young people in everyday life without inciting violence.

Comments

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Victor M. F. Igreja has written a fascinating article that offers a thought-provoking challenge to some common popular and scholarly assumptions about the relationship between media and violence: he calls into question the notion that the viewing of media violence leads inevitably to an uncomplicated reproduction or reenactment of that violence and that young consumers of this film violence experience it passively as a form of entertainment. Although the space limitations of an article make necessary a very selective analytic focus and use of ethnographic description, I suggest below that Igreja's account could benefit from linking his discussion of the consumption of media violence in Mozambique to several different questions or approaches that are absent or underrepresented.

What stood out for me initially upon reading this article was a relative absence of focus on memory and commemoration that marks much of the recent scholarly work on violence in my own geographical area of interest, Southeast Asia (e.g., Kwon 2006; Waterson and Kwok 2012; Zurbuchen 2005). On the one hand, Igreja's decision to focus on the practical and more present-oriented ends is refreshing, leading us to wonder whether issues of memory are sometimes overly fetishized in academic discussions of violence, thus crowding out other fruitful approaches. However, issues of memory do eventually emerge in Igreja's ethnography in subtle ways that leave unanswered questions and seem to deserve more attention. For instance, Igreja's mention of the parental anxiety that the children's viewing of film violence could revive certain unwanted memories of the war raises the question of how, within this context, memories of violence are differentially located and selectively avoided.

Furthermore, since the youth with whom Igreja worked from 2009 to 2013 would presumably not have been old enough to experience the Mozambican civil war itself, it would have been interesting to have had Igreja devote more attention to how the media of violent action films structures and intertwines with the second-generation "postmemorial" experience (Hirsch 2008) of these young people. The ways in which Igreja's young interlocutors interpret and relate to film violence bring to mind Carol Kidron's discussion of "the nonverbal, intersubjective, embodied, and material traces of the past in everyday life, forms of knowledge that resist articulation and collective enlistment." (Kidron 2009:7). Were these elements of Igreja's case study taken further, the work would have had the potential to make a valuable contribution to recent scholarship on the intergenerational transmission of memories of violence (e.g., Argenti and Schramm 2010).

The article provoked several other questions: for instance, given that in the title of the article, Igreja calls special attention to the global nature of the film violence viewed in the *salões*, there could have been more attention given to the perceived significance of the "foreignness" of the films and the violence that they depict. Igreja is, in a sense, building on earlier anthropological studies of foreign film viewings in non-Western contexts that stress the active role of audiences in constructing meaning and film viewing as an unpredictable, contextual event (e.g. Hahn 1994; Kulick and Willson 1994). His account effectively takes these studies further by showing us a particular permutation of "audience" that emerges in the aftermath of mass violence. Yet, Igreja could perhaps provide a more thorough explanation of the relationship between the foreignness of these films and the perception of them by the youth as a particularly abundant source of *talentos*, or "skills."

Finally, as I read Igreja's accounts of the remembered violence of the civil war, the violence among the youth, and the depicted violence in the action films, I found myself wondering to what extent Igreja (and his interlocutors) distinguish or conflate these different forms of violence and how an explanation of these possible distinctions could further enrich Igreja's analysis. For instance, within what contexts are labels such as "political," "criminal," or "domestic" attached to acts or threats of violence? When do these distinctions seem salient, and when do they blur? And what sorts of context-specific experiences and definitions of "the political" may be found embedded in these distinctions?

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No-surrender-no-retreat was the name a small Ugandan boy gave me in the late 1990s. Whenever I came to his place to meet with his father as part of my PhD research on the Lord's Resistance Army and the war in northern Uganda (Finnström 2003; 2008), he would run around in excitement, loudly announcing to everyone that No-surrender-no-retreat was back. It was of course a mixed-up reference to *No Retreat, No Surrender*, the 1986 American martial arts film starring Jean-Claude Van Damme as the villain.

In Gulu town, northern Uganda, I soon became known as the white guy who walked around. Friends often complained about my non-Ugandan (or was it Swedish?) way of goal-oriented walking, more or less straight from A to B, leaving one meeting for another. Embodied as it was, I had to unlearn this, if the rumor of me as a US marine was not to take root. But I also remember one late night early into fieldwork, when I went home from a town bar, walking on my own through the dark night. Why not walk with the imperial confidence of

the US marine that everyone seems to think I am, I thought, and perhaps I will be left alone. No retreat, no surrender.

Many anthropologists have scrutinized the ways humanitarian organizations in the West and Hollywood filmmakers present Africa and its conflicts visually and with what agendas (e.g., Eltringham 2013; Finnström 2012). Anthropologists have also investigated instances of filmmaking as part and parcel of an actual war effort, in Africa (e.g., Utas 2006) and elsewhere (e.g., Sumera 2013). Igreja lays out his ethnography against a slightly different body of anthropological media studies. His material offers a new story altogether, in that he focuses on (very) young Mozambican consumers of televised film violence and their agency, reasoning, and complex experiences of self-assertion at a time of great social change. In anchoring the analysis in his informants' lifeworlds, Igreja transcends the moralizing discourse present with much psychologizing media research as well as the equally moralizing discourse of his informants' parents and guardians, who stress their importance in controlling the young generation.

I sympathize with Igreja's analytical refusal to accept any teleology by which young people allegedly consume and appropriate violent films simply in order to build self-assertions of identity that are completely new, fully independent, and, by definition, violent. Here is instead an analysis of cultural mediations that does not allow the global to determine or overshadow the local. Such mediations will always be grounded in everyday sociocultural life, proving the sterility of broad sociological and Eurocentric categories such as the modern versus the traditional.

In the *salões* (video halls), youngsters learn to embody *talentos* (skills), and they disseminate their new *talentos* to other children in socialization processes that are not restricted to the *salões*. Attentive to gender differences and individual biographies, Igreja's ethnography says something general while at the same time acknowledging fluidity and the idiosyncratic. So if these young film consumers learn violence, they will not necessarily enact any aggressive behavior because of this. There are no models, psychological or otherwise, to predict their responses, Igreja suggests, as he delineates how meaning is constituted and continuously reconstituted. *Talentos*, built from the video hall experiences, are about body readiness, about submission and concentration, and about the ability to detect "the bad." The interactive teachings of Jean-Claude Van Damme, Jackie Chan, and other movie stars are processed through the culture of the young film consumers. As soon as we give violence meaning, it becomes cultural, to echo the work of the late Neil Whitehead (2004), whom Igreja references. So even if the action heroes of the screen may encourage violent acting out, as we often tend to believe, they also teach self-control and encourage young people to engage in dialogue with potential opponents. From the culturally grounded perspective of Igreja's young film consumers, Van Damme and Jackie Chan are masters of empowerment and guidance.

I remember my surprise when, at the height of the war in northern Uganda, a young man explained to me how war and

martial arts films had taught him how to fight. Among his many fighting skills, he was an expert in karate, he proudly told me. I registered his comment in my notebook, while at the same time wondering why this young man seemed to confirm, rather uncritically, the colonial, historical, and contemporary stereotype of northern Ugandans as more prone to violence than other Ugandans. Igreja's ethnography encourages me to rethink the whole situation. Indeed, this is how good ethnography is supposed to work. And when No-surrender-no-retreat was walking home with his new self-assertion that night in Gulu town, perhaps he embodied the idea of *talentos*. Or did I not?

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Media Violence: The Impact of Culture and the Social Context

Despite decades of controversial debates in media violence research, with thousands of respective studies about its impact or nonimpact on recipients, some conclusions seem possible. A particularly convincing and empirically confirmed theory on TV and other media's effects has been formulated by Bandura (1985) in the social cognitive learning theory. Children, adolescents, and adults are influenced by real and virtual models and learn behavioral habits through positive or negative reinforcement of both the model and oneself. Media violence does not per se create aggressive behavior. However, the respective risk increases when some kind of reward is involved. This can be status, reduction of frustration, gender role stabilization among males, or physiological thrill. The American Psychological Association (2015) regards the risk of media violence such that it published a further task force report that, based on empirical evidence of the majority of studies, suggests an aggressive-content-reducing policy across media and regulatory authorities.

Most research on media effects has been conducted in the Western hemisphere and, in particular, in Anglo-Saxon countries. Electronic media were already far developed when those empirical studies started. An interesting exception is a remote Canadian region, where it was possible to collect behavioral data before and after the introduction of TV (Williams 1986). There, aggressive tendencies among children were shown to increase.

A few studies have also addressed other cultures and regions of the world. Here, especially other forms of content, other social environments, and other value systems have been taken into account. A recent study by Igreja (2015b) considered the watching situation in so-called video houses and the cultural specifics of the former African conflict zone Mozambique.

Groebel (2000) included a global study (standardized interviews and questionnaires) of 5,000 12-year-olds in 25 countries

Table 1. Media violence effects matrix

Processing	Physiological	Emotional	Cognitive	Social
Disposition	Gender; sensation seeker	Gender; empathy	Competence	Extraversion
Motivation	Thrill	Identification	Orientation	Role models
Medium:				
Formal feature	Special effects	Music, etc.	Realism	Rituals
Content	Tension	Hero	Credibility	In-group behavior
Context:				
Situation	Other thrills	Frustration	Similarity	Similar groups
Culture	High tech	Violence	Perceived threat	Social control
Effect:				
Short term	Arousal	Aggression/fear	Comparison	Imitation
Long term	Arousal spiral	Habits	World views	Groupthink

around the world, representing different cultures, violent environments, social contexts, and value systems, in order to identify the working of these factors in the process of possible media violence effects.

Based on a multidimensional definition of aggression (Groebel and Hinde 1991), it became obvious that there is no such thing as a mono-causal relationship between media content and the viewers' behavior and attitudes. Summarizing Igreja's and previous research, an approach that considers a multitude of psychological and social factors and different stages of the effects process leads to the media violence effects matrix (table 1). It distinguishes between physiological, emotional, cognitive, and social coping modes and personality disposition, situational motives, media characteristics, and short- and long-term perspectives. Most of these variables have been analyzed in studies with one or few factors, too many to individually be cited here. However, intradisciplinary research mostly did not consider the necessity to approach the problem across different levels and processes. Here, the matrix needs to be featured as self-explanatory. For further details, see Groebel (2014) and Groebel, Noam, and Feldmann (2006).

The UNESCO Global Study on Media Violence (Groebel 2000) also presented evidence that the effects of media violence need to be considered in interaction with real violence

experience, similarity between one's own environment and TV images of the world, and social controls within the culture. Table 2 shows some differences between TV-related factors in a subsample of five (out of 25) countries.

The data from table 2 and numerous additional analyses from the same study demonstrate that media violence effects on aggression (and fear) are highest when they interact with a violent actual environment, access to arms, and a relatively low social-control value system. With this formula, despite similar aggressive TV content, Japan and Brazil as examples differ: children are much more aggressive in Brazil, regard man as generally much more evil, and have a more fatalistic worldview (i.e., are more likely to assume that murder is the number one cause of death) than in Japan. In Mozambique, as Igreja (2015b) shows, community watching creates yet another kind of impact. Media violence can have effects. However, these depend on a broad spectrum of psychological, social, cultural, and anthropological factors.

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Table 2. Select data from UNESCO Global Study on Violence

Variable	Germany	Japan	Brazil	Angola	Fiji
TV access	97	99	97	65	66
Violent TV preference	32	35	42	11	29
Owning arms	16	24	40	10	9
Aggressive TV model	14	9	34	8	50
High fear	69	62	61	86	69
Death = murder (in own country)	17	11	45	16	5
New York	75	. . .	49	25	59
Man is evil	23	42	68	35	53

Note. Values indicate the percentage of children who answered that the respective condition or belief applies. $N = 5,000$ 12-year-olds. From Groebel 2000.

This article deals with the question of why violent films have grown in popularity among young people in the Gorongosa district of Mozambique. The author explores the afterlife of these films and the ways in which they are incorporated in the social lives of local youth. He offers the possibility of analyzing the youths' taste for violent films as an evolving local ritual of revelation and a legacy of the civil war in their country (1976–1992).

The work provides a detailed account of the ways in which these films—and their main characters—have become part of a youth subculture in Gorongosa. Provided are detailed accounts of the ways in which the learning derived from these violent films is regurgitated and mastered by means of the body in fighting techniques referred to as *talentos* (skills)

in colloquial speech. The social contexts in which these embodied skills and fighting techniques are put in action are presented, and references are made to economic and political aspects that characterize Gorongosa today—among these being the lack of future and livelihood alternatives for the numerous unemployed youth. The case is presented with great detail, and the connections are made in terms of possible continuities with other forms of violence reenactment.

In this article, the author successfully challenges current psychological studies in media violence that would commonly see these practices as consumption with negative effects on the youth. Igreja describes the complexity of this cultural practice and demonstrates why it cannot be understood simply as a form of consumption or solely as a matter of preference or taste. He situates the uses of these videos in collective and historical context. Yet the thesis Igreja proposes to counteract a simplistic analysis of these practices, while compelling, is not entirely convincing. He draws a parallel between the current uses of violent films among the youth and rituals of revelation through spirit possession in the postwar period, which he has extensively documented.¹⁸ He proposes we see the usages of these violent films as part of an evolving ritual of revelation.

There are a few reasons why his argument is not entirely convincing. No attention is given to a fundamental fact; in ritual spirit possession, it is mostly women who become possessed by the *gamba* spirits, while the enactment of violent films occurs among male youth. The *talentos* derived from the films are framed within a gendered masculine culture of physical strength, the ability to fight, and inclination toward violence. Based on this quite clear gendered fact, a comparison could have been drawn between practices that appear at first sight to be clearly opposed. The *gamba* spirit takes possession of an individual body that is often, importantly, the body of a woman. The *gamba* spirit speaks through the woman's body to tell a truth, to restore a moral order, to make justice. This already evokes connections with the reinstatement of women's power in the aftermath of war situations in which women often find themselves powerless victims of violence. The films-derived skills are instead enacted by male youth (yet the films are also watched by young women). The centrality of this performance is that the youngster can effectively and publicly demonstrate that he possesses these physical skills. It is all about individual control of body techniques.

There is another fundamental difference in that, in spirit possession, the past is invoked to deal with difficulties in the present. The past speaks through women's mouths to find

justice or closure in the present. The film enactments are instead framed in the immediacy of the present in practices that are consumed by the youth and do not seek to repair or to restore any order or to solve lingering conflicts. What seems to be happening, and here I agree with Igreja, is that through reenactment of the *talentos* provided by violent films, the youth find potential for reassertion through demonstration of their physical capacities and power. These *talentos* equip the male youth to reassert themselves through the embodied language of violence amid a lack of alternatives for development and integration in the adult world as individuals of value. The work is, however, an excellent account of the local shapes this cultural practice takes among the African youth; their agency is understood with the necessary complexity and in reference to the past and the current systemic forms of exclusion.

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Film Violence and Self-Assertion in the Workings of Culture

I read Victor M. F. Igreja's essay, "Media and Legacies of War: Responses to Global Film Violence in Conflict Zones," with a great degree of enthusiasm. As outlined by Igreja, very few anthropologists have dealt with media violence among youth in non-Western places, and in any case, most conventional explorations in media studies and psychology tend to produce somewhat linear narratives that often end up offering predictable and reductionist positions of simple causality: violent media products tend to create more violence. Even the few anthropologists who have ventured into this relatively untraveled domain tend to read their material through approaches of modernity in which violence is seen to promote new cultures of violence and masculinity. This is something that Igreja highlights early in his essay.

By focusing on the narratives of young people who are enthusiastic followers of action films screened at informal *salões* in Gorongosa, central Mozambique, Igreja takes us on a journey where we are invited to see how such relatively recent cultural practices might be understood better if their implications are located within evolving contexts of local rituals of revelation, the legacies of the civil war, and postwar challenges. In recent reflections, it has become obvious to me that serious engagement with manifestations of the visual has mostly been dismissed by mainstream anthropology and has been exiled to the confines of visual anthropology. For me, as a person keen to explore to what extent mainstream anthropology can traverse beyond its comfort zones in search of both methodological and theoretical innovations

18. Victor Igreja completed his PhD on the processes of healing, reconciliation, and justice in the aftermath of the Mozambican civil war in 2007 at the University of Leiden, Netherlands, under the supervision of Professors Annemiek Richters, Ria Reis, and Irae Lundin and with the support of the late Professors Gerti Hesseling, Peter Riedesser, and Stephen Ellis.

on the one hand and more intriguing research objects on the other, Igreja's paper suggests a world of possibilities, particularly with regard to the anthropology of violence and visuality. In my own work in yet another former war zone, Sri Lanka, I often wondered how to make sense of utterances made by youth experiencing war in the country's hinterland—and with similar tastes in film—if an approach such as Igreja's was adopted in understanding the impact of such films in their lives.

Reception of televised violence is not a simple act of consumption and reaction among these youth touched and sometimes scarred by violence but has also to do with war and postwar realities and processes of self-assertion. But this self-assertion itself is not a simple matter of imitating film violence, as commonly understood by some adults whom Igreja met. The processes of consuming film violence become intelligible when the entire structure of emergent emotions and practices are further imbricated within local practices of mediation, particularly rituals of revelation enacted by the *gamba*, or the spirits of young soldiers who died in the Mozambican civil war. A crucial argument made by Igreja is that the *gamba* embody "imaginariness of violence," which also impact the manner in which youth put in motion their practices of self-assertion in ways that intersect with film violence. In other words, film violence is read by these youth in specific ways that make cultural sense and not in the manner assumed by their creators in Hollywood and other centers of film production. I had also noted in Sri Lanka the emergence of images of soldiers clad in a manner very similar to characters from *Rambo* and *Delta Force*—movies that captured the imagination of youths across southern parts of the country. When they hero-worshipped these reincarnated characters of local military lore, their references were both local and Hollywood. As noted by Igreja, the mere act of screening globally circulating mass media objects such as action films in *salões* does not simply dislodge preexisting mediation practices and possibilities of personal and collective transformation. The popularity of such films offers these existing practices new forums of expression and reinvention.

The youth of Gorongosa understood their internalization of multiple meanings of film violence as *talentos* (skills) that, once internalized, would be put into practice in their own circumstances as useful life skills. Interestingly, it was through dreams that the possibilities and limitations of film violence in the form of *talentos* came to some of Igreja's interlocutors. In other words, seeing dreams worked as a filtering process through which film violence was mediated to make sense to the youth in Gorongosa. As such, dreaming of heroes such as Jackie Chan and Jean-Claude Van Damme who were created in distant places like Hollywood becomes a *talento* in Gorongosa reminiscent of the diviners' need for spirits to empower their work.

While Igreja's essay opens up many possibilities for reading violence and the visual in anthropology not just in

his chosen location, I believe the essay would have been enriched by a distinction of the kind of action films that his interlocutors watched during war and postwar periods and what might have prompted such variation, if any.

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Victor Igreja's rich examination of video houses and the young people who use them in the Gorongosa district of central Mozambique sits at the intersection of several interdisciplinary interests, offering questions for scholars working across the ethnography of postconflict societies, the anthropology of childhood, and media anthropology. The focus of my contribution here relates almost exclusively to this third body of research, considering what the ideas and experiences explored in Gorongosa might offer to existing debates in media anthropology—and, perhaps, to the wider interdisciplinary field of media studies.

At first glance, the questions that prompted Igreja's investigation seem quite orthodox. Why do young people in Gorongosa enjoy consuming highly violent media? And how do such representations of violence relate to their lived experiences, violent and otherwise? Although the effects of violent media consumption on young audiences have been a prevalent concern across much of the Western world since the mid-twentieth century, these questions have been largely avoided in anthropological research, perhaps due to the somewhat unsatisfactory way in which such debates are dominated by US-oriented mass communications approaches dealing with media effects, uses, and gratifications. In contrast, Igreja's research shows us what exploring the topic of media violence can look like when undertaken alongside a serious and long-standing ethnographic attention to the experience of violence in everyday life. It is not only the contextual detail of central Mozambique that is relevant here but also a particular understanding of how recent and ongoing acts of violence exist within the worldview of Igreja's young informants, adding new angles to any broader discussion of the media-violence nexus.

In a number of ways, this article productively steers media scholarship away from simplistic assumptions about the direction and nature of the connection between consuming representations of violence and enacting violence. Perhaps most obviously, the example of childhood in Gorongosa clearly dispels any notion of a mythical world in which children enjoy an innocent and violence-free environment before they encounter violent media. Avoiding this assumption is equally useful whether one studies young consumers downloading media on home computers in California or those watching videos in a communal space in Mozambique. Second, Igreja's case study reminds us that even in spaces of conflict and in-

security, there are also practices of leisure or recreation that are worthy of serious consideration; it is revealing that for the children who feature in this article, film violence offers an opportunity for imaginative play even while it is also offering other possibilities. Third, Igreja's work alerts us to nuanced and productive questions of how people negotiate, through media, among other practices, "expanding relations of domination and submission and violence and its containment," while also acknowledging the unpredictability with which such relations are negotiated. What is important here is not measuring a degree of cause and effect but rather understanding how viewers' own relationship to media content is manifested in their broader lives. As Igreja argues, such a relation between media violence and real-life violence is not deterministic, but rather "the reception of film violence in tandem with war and post-war experiences shows a less obvious and more anxious and negotiated process of self-assertion among young people in Mozambique."

Young DVD consumers in Gorongosa would fit into what Conrad P. Kottak (drawing from his landmark study of television in 1980s Brazil) might describe as late stage I in terms of novelty and social impact; in rural Brazil at that time, Kottak (2009) reports, communities that had only recently received television would treat television viewing as a novelty in which "gazes are usually glued to the set" (139). Viewers sat still with alertness to the medium in a way that bears some resemblance to the behavior observed by Igreja in *salões de filmes*. One wonders whether this attentive audience behavior that Igreja finds so similar to spiritual practices will change over time, as it did in rural Brazil. Might the power ascribed to films by Igreja's own informants decrease with familiarity or at least become less visible and more taken for granted? The vocabulary used by the Gorongosa boys nicely captures the idea that, far from importing unknown ideas, these newly introduced action films "reveal things" to them, enabling them to capture qualities for use in their own social life. Media texts make manifest ideas and possibilities from within the consumer's own worldview—this we already know. But rarely are we so able to see how such a process of assimilation and interpretation is understood by young people themselves as one way of managing fear, strength, and control in a challenging and fast-changing world.

Reply

The opportunity given by the editorial team of *Current Anthropology* to have my article circulated and effect discussions with colleagues and commentators around the globe is well appreciated. Whenever the topic of violence is raised, it leads to diverse responses that somewhat reiterate the view of violence as a multifaceted phenomenon. The varied engagements, interpretations, and responses of my interlocutors in

Gorongosa, central Mozambique, in relation to global media violence did not escape this logic of violence as potentially imbued with multiple meanings as well as generative of unpredictable outcomes. The commentators of this article also agreed with the notion that a proper understanding of violence requires an analysis of the cultural and political context. This is a basic tenet, at least in the anthropology of violence; however, it has yet to take a firm hold in other disciplines, particularly psychological studies of media violence. In what follows, I will focus on some of the interesting and challenging points and questions raised by the discussants.

In this article, there are three types of interlocutors: the youths, the parents and other meaningful adult guardians, and the owners of the *salões de filmes*, or "video houses." When we look at the central problem from the perspective of the parents and other adult guardians, the memories of the civil war and the fears that these evoke become center stage, in that these were discursively used to deride the youths' preference for film violence. Following this thread, Andrew Conroe correctly pointed out that the conflicts stirred by film violence could be indicative of how memories of war violence are differentially located and selectively avoided. In contexts of major political transitions, debates about what and who to remember and what to forget are heightened and often stir serious political controversy; memories can thereby be used as weapons. In Gorongosa, the arrival of film violence also highlighted somewhat similar controversies, as the adults rejected film violence on the grounds that it revealed dangerous knowledge and triggered memories of war violence. Yet the same adults did not express disdain over the actions and memories of violence displayed in the *gamba* rituals of possession. However, unlike political struggles for the control of memories at the official and state levels (Igreja 2008), in Gorongosa, the sides in the conflict and their frontiers were not clearly delineated. For instance, a number of young viewers indicated that in some cases, film violence shaped their understanding and increased their sense of respect for the war memories of their parents. Bruceloi was a case in point; he indicated that he avoided war films in order to pay respect to the memories of his grandparents. This attitude contrasted with that of Trêsbaldas, who considered film violence as helpful to anticipating future scenarios of military activity and war violence.

As the youths watched film violence, the "foreignness" of the films and the violence they depict was not a central issue for them. The youths' perception was mediated by existing cultural practices of revelation, and in many cultural groups in sub-Saharan Africa (Whyte 1997), the foreignness, or strangeness, of a certain object or practice can paradoxically be perceived to increase its concealing, revelatory, or transformative powers (Igreja 2015c). In this regard, the more the violent scenes in the film appeared foreign or strange, the more they helped to establish and reinforce hierarchies among the young viewers through the acquisition of *talentos*. Yet they were all leveled, or the limits were established, once

the strangeness of the violent scenes defied the bodily capacities of the youths to develop and embody *talentos*.

The diverse voices of my interlocutors indicate fruitful ways of understanding violence, particularly the idea of violence as instrumental. In this regard, memories of war violence for the adults, film violence for the youths, and domestic disciplinary violence and ritual violence for all fall within this broader category of violence as instrumental, in that it is legitimate and reinforces a certain sense of community. When confronted with new and unexpected situations, the notion of violence as imagined first (Schroder and Schmidt 2001) is highlighted in ways that the embodiment of violence through *talentos* plays a role in containing violence. What unites both practices of violence and containment of violence is the legitimacy of the violent acts in each situation. In this regard, violence is not an event. Violence is a process that links mechanisms of enculturation (discipline and respect) and social transformation (new hierarchical relations among youths or healing memories of war violence). When violent actions seem to lack legitimacy, violence is regarded as disordering or destructive. Thus, the labels “political,” “criminal,” or “domestic” are secondary to whether violence is legitimate. In fact, these labels or distinctions contribute only to reducing the multiplicity of experiences and meanings of violence. The violence enacted by Logan is a case in point. Neither he nor the audience was primarily concerned with distinguishing violence as public, criminal, or entertaining. Instead, they were both focused on determining the legitimacy of the violence that killed one of the participants in the fight, which, in this case, they agreed was illegitimate. It was a kind of *ku nerana*, *nerana*, or “destructive violence.”

As Jo Groebel rightly points out, most research on the effects of media violence was conducted in the Western hemisphere; only recently has new research been undertaken in non-Western settings. The example of the natural experiment on the impact of television in Canada in the 1970s by Tannis Williams is, without doubt, interesting because Williams studied the communities in Canada, as I did in Gorongosa, during and after the arrival of televised film violence. However, unlike psychologists, we, as anthropologists, are concerned with understanding how past and contemporary experiences of spectators shape their new practices of watching televised film violence. Here the Gorongosa study significantly contrasts with the Canadian study, as Williams did not focus on the everyday lives of young viewers or the place and role of violence in those communities, nor did he listen to the diverse voices of young viewers and other participants in that media economy. Without including these aspects as part of the analytic focus, psychologists run the risk of constructing communities and viewers as frozen in time until the arrival of television, which putatively produces some kind of awakening. Groebel’s own studies using a multidimensional definition of aggression and combining diverse individual and social factors are innovative within the psychological and psychiatric tradition of media violence research. However, let us look at the cases Groebel chose to high-

light differences in relation to a few indicators. In the examples of Japan and Brazil, first I wondered how comparable these two countries are. They have very different levels of socioeconomic development; the level of social inequality in Brazil is enormous; and the problems of social disorder and insecurity in the streets and households of Brazil are far more complex than in Japan. Yet, for the sake of debating something here, let me pretend that these contextual factors do not exist for a while. For instance, table 2 shows degrees of difference that raise questions regarding the rationale of some of the comparisons. One wonders, if levels of “violent television preferences” differ (let us presume that differences are statistically significant) in both Japan (35%) and Brazil (42%), then what is the rationale to compare these two countries in terms of the impact that watching film violence generates in the lives of viewers? If few people in Japan indicated a preference for violent television, why is it that so many research participants have “high fear” in Japan? The differences between Japan and Brazil are minimal when it comes to this indicator, and I would doubt that the gap between 62% (Japan) and 61% (Brazil) is statistically significant. The fact that “high fear” is similar in both countries needs to be analyzed, and Groebel’s conclusion that the countries differ seems hasty and premature. This data suggests that perhaps “high fear” in both Japan and Brazil is not triggered by watching violent film, and prior to considering possible quantitative similarities or differences in Brazil, Japan, Angola, and so on, we need to know how people attach meaning to experiences of fear in these locations and which experiences of fear paralyze or drive people to act. Which fear is openly spoken about and which is hidden and perhaps somatized? Is fear triggered by visible or invisible forces or both? I think Groebel’s study piques curiosity for the typical ethnographic gaze to find out how the everyday lives of young people in Japan, Brazil, Angola, or any other location are framed by their viewing preferences, and vice versa, and the competition that evolves among various existing mechanisms of mediated violence. One such mechanism in Japan could be, for instance, manga, which people of all ages read and which sometimes depict stories of extraordinary violence and horror.

One last aspect that I would like to consider in the context of Groebel’s studies is the use of quantitative methods. Unlike many anthropologists, I do not criticize the use of quantitative methods and statistical analysis in a vulgar way (Igreja 2010a). Yet I think that a good quantitative study should be preceded by a properly conducted ethnography (Igreja et al. 2010). By this, I don’t think that the usual “in-depth ethnographic interviews” or simply “ethnographically driven interviews” are sufficiently satisfactory to enrich quantitative studies. While conducting an ethnography is time consuming, the complexity of insights that we gain to subsequently use in quantitative studies is indispensable and irreplaceable to generate innovative studies and knowledge (Igreja et al. 2009).

Lorena Nunez raises interesting points regarding the merits of considering the watching of film violence as similar to the existing rituals of revelation, particularly the parallels

I traced with spirit possession. The gender differences in these two practices could be interpreted based on an understanding of the perceived genealogy of evil in the lives of both boys and girls. Following the views of one anonymous reviewer, it could be argued that girls learn to detect evil in their inner social circles, whereas the boys learn to fight evil encroaching from the outside. Yet this is not the central issue. The fundamental reality here is that both boys and girls explained their experiences of watching film violence using the cultural language that emerges from spirit possession experiences. As Sverker Finnström also asserts, following the late Neil Whitehead, young people gave meaning to film violence through their cultural beliefs and practices, particularly cultural ideas about how knowledge is acquired, how knowledge is made present, and how knowledge is exhausted and extinguished. In this regard, we may miss the point if, as Nunez does, we suggest that *talentos* are “all about individual control of body techniques.” Nunez’s emphasis on “physical skills” is rather problematic, given that young people like Trêsbaldas also spoke about his dreams with “Master Jai.” In this case, as Sasanka Perera insightfully observes, “seeing dreams worked as a filtering process through which film violence was mediated to make sense to the youth in Gorongosa.” Additionally, Muguduane spoke of how the words of Van Damme’s coach in a film scene framed his mind-set and his bodily dispositions. These views are not only about physical skills, they are, rather, about cultural imaginaries and states of mind. While, as Nunez correctly affirms, spirit possession evokes past experiences of violence and the need for social repair and justice, *talentos* should also be seen as accretions that expand ongoing processes of social transformation, particularly self-assertion. In this regard, as spirits are voices, *talentos* also constitute forms of voices that allow young people to crystallize social hierarchies among themselves and to articulate their own world visions in their relations with, and sometimes struggles against, their parents and adult guardians.

Anna Cristina Pertierra also brings very insightful points to this discussion. Among various things, Pertierra looks, through the lens of Conrad Kottak, at social dynamics shaken by the arrival of television in Brazil in the 1980s to ask how the media world of the Gorongosas will look in the aftermath of the novelty era. This point helps us to delve again into the dialectics of old and new. As with many objects that float out in the world in search of markets and *compradores* (buyers), the apparent foreignness and strangeness of televised violence is deemed, as the young people showed, to be transformed in culturally meaningful ways. In this regard, and using the analogy of stages, stage I is not the arrival but its transformation. In my understanding, there is no other stage than stage I. As the young people demonstrated, what generates impact is not the visceral televised image, as some crude images were rejected. It is the culturally transformed image that finds its way into their everyday lives. In this way, there is no end to people’s capacity to be staggered and to innovate. And the fact that local diviners introduced the notion of television, image, and film in their divination practices (Igreja 2015c) attests to this endless ca-

capacity to conceive the world in terms of a constant interplay and mingling of old and new practices and processes. Thus, the stage mentality does not fit with how the Gorongosas perceive and imagine their social world.

—Victor M. F. Igreja

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